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C O N F I D E N T I A L LILONGWE 000540

SIPDIS

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TAGS: ECON KCOR KDEM PGOV PREL MI  
SUBJECT: SPEAKER OF PARLIAMENT COLLAPSES DURING IMPEACHMENT DEBATE

REF: LILONGWE 00508

Classified By: Classified By: CDA D. Gilmour for reasons 1.4 b and d

¶1. (C) Summary: The Speaker of Parliament collapsed on the House floor on June 23 as MPs debated procedures for possible Presidential impeachment. He was then taken to the hospital, stabilized, and then flown to South Africa. Parliament has been indefinitely suspended, and it is unclear who will take the place of the well-regarded Speaker. Meanwhile, President Mutharika has told donors that he does not believe that the impeachment will proceed, because the charges will not stand the scrutiny of judicial review. End summary.

SPEAKER SUFFERS HEART ATTACK

¶2. (U) Speaker Rodwell Munyenjembe fell into his chair as he was trying to quiet a shouting match between MPs yesterday around noon, suffering from an apparent heart attack. Opposition MPs had put forward a motion to set up the procedural mechanism within Parliament for the impeachment of presidents or vice-presidents. The ability to impeach presidents is laid out in the Constitution, but the procedures for impeachment have never been added to Parliament's "standing orders." This must be done before any impeachment motions are presented.

¶3. (U) After the motion to set up impeachment proceedings was put forward, the Speaker declared the issue must first go through Parliament's Legal Affairs Committee. MPs then began shouting back and forth, the Speaker stood up to quiet them, and then collapsed back into his chair. Nearly twenty minutes then passed before paramedics arrived.

¶4. (SBU) The attending hospital physician told Charge that the speaker was "nearly dead" by the time he arrived at the hospital, and that he had to be defibrillated and resuscitated. The doctor speculated that he may have suffered brain damage, but could not be sure because the hospital did not have the required diagnostic equipment to make a determination. The Speaker was evacuated to South Africa by air ambulance late in the evening of June 23.

PRESIDENT SEEMINGLY NOT WORRIED ABOUT IMPEACHMENT

¶5. (C) At precisely the same moment this drama was playing out in Parliament, the ambassadors of the UK and Germany and the UN ResRep were meeting with President Mutharika elsewhere in State House, as part of a regular series of meetings with donor heads of mission. The participants in that meeting told Charge that the president briefly discussed the impeachment effort, but dismissed it as political maneuvering on the part of the opposition, particularly the UDF. Mutharika opined that the charges would not stand the scrutiny of judicial review. He lamented that the impeachment debate was taking valuable time and energy from the important business of parliament, particularly the budget.

COMMENT: SCHEDULE UNCERTAIN BUT BUDGET WILL LIKELY PASS

¶6. (SBU) The Speaker's exit leaves the current session of Parliament, including the proposed budget and possible impeachment motions, in flux. Parliament has been adjourned indefinitely, and it is not clear if it will sit next week. The Speaker is very highly regarded, and looked at as one of the few people capable of maintaining order in the House. His deputies are both junior MPs, and it is doubtful they will be able to take his place effectively. If Munyenjembe is unable to return, the President could put forward a new candidate for speaker, but it is unclear who that might be.

¶7. (SBU) On the budget front, an opposition MP with whom we met last week has publicly said Parliament will not reject the budget. The Deputy chair of Parliament's Budget and

Finance Committee was quoted in the press as saying that the opposition has some problems with the budget, but will not completely derail it. Parliament's debate of the budget itself has not yet begun, but many Malawians have expressed concerns that the opposition might reject it for political reasons.

GILMOUR